



Living
Healthy,
Working Well

Wellness Tips

Helping Someone with an Eating Disorder

Eating disorders can be among the most difficult afflictions for family members to understand. Feelings of frustration and helplessness are common. Early diagnosis and treatment can save the life of a person with an eating disorder, but it is important to remember that only an experienced doctor or therapist can treat them effectively. If the person has lost a significant amount of his or her normal body weight, or you feel that his or her life is in danger, seek immediate medical attention. The following are some additional tips if someone you know is suffering from an eating disorder.

Do . . .

Educate yourself. Read as much as possible about eating disorders. This will help you understand the problem and put you in a better position to help those around you.

Listen. People with eating disorders often feel ashamed and alone. Your support may provide the strength the person needs to seek professional help.

Encourage the person to get help. Try to get the person to seek professional help, but don't be too forceful. This will make the person more anxious, and could discourage the person from seeking help. Unless in immediate danger, avoid forcing or threatening the person to get help.

Don't . . .

Nag about eating or not eating. People with eating disorders are extremely self-conscious about their eating habits. By nagging, you will just make them more uncomfortable and reinforce the behavior.

Hide food to keep the person from binge eating. Although people with bulimia or binge eating disorder may ask for your help, hiding food from them will only create resentment.

Force the person to eat. Forcing the person to eat will make him or her feel childish, out-of-control, disapproved of, and scolded. Once again, this just reinforces the behavior.

Seek Help

An eating disorder is an illness that is difficult to understand. Identifying and treating these disorders can also be hard. But the sooner a person is diagnosed, the better the chances are for recovery. While you can't force someone to seek help, you can educate yourself and develop a support system for those around you who may be at risk.

Information adapted from the National Eating Disorders Association at <http://www.aabainc.org/> and <http://www.edap.org>

Call Your EAP

If you or someone you care about needs help, you may wish to contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAP counselors are available 24 hours a day, every day of the week, to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you. Information, self-help tools, and other resources are also available online at www.MagellanAssist.com.

